

"The Folly" (Smith-Custis House)
3 miles east of Accomac, north side of Folly Creek
Accomac Vicinity
Accomack County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-626

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

"THE FOLLY" (SMITH-CUSTIS HOUSE)

Address: 3 miles east of Accomac, north side of Folly Creek, Accomac Vicinity, Accomack County, Virginia.

Present Owners: L. Floyd Nock, Jr., Meriam Nock, and Sarah Nock.

Present Occupants: Mr. and Mrs. L. Floyd Nock, Jr.

Present Use: Residence.

Brief Statement of Significance: This is an 18th-century dwelling, and once probably the site of Port of Folly Landing, one of the two ports of entry for Accomack County during the 18th century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: 1753, William Robinson Smith; 1760, Elizabeth Smith who later married Thomas Custis; 1803, William Robinson Custis (Colonel Bob); 1838, Thomas B. Custis. Next followed a succession of owners. 1898, L. Floyd Nock; 1920, L. Floyd Nock, Jr. and his sisters, Miss Meriam and Miss Sarah Nock.

2. Date of erection: Small section, story-and-a-half, is said to have been erected about 1759 by William Robinson Smith, and this could be right. The larger section is believed to have been built about 1800.

3. Notes on alterations and additions: Restored by L. Floyd Nock, Jr. in 1946.

4. Sources of information: Personal inspection; court records; Ralph T. Whitelaw, Virginia's Eastern Shore. A History of North Hampton and Accomack Counties, 2 vols. (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1951); old descriptions in various publications.

B. Supplemental Material: The following was prepared in connection with a recent Garden Week in Virginia open-house tour:

"In eighteenth century usage the meaning of folly was quite different from that of today; a folly was a wooded knoll and it was just such an eminence at the head of Folly Creek on Virginia's Eastern Shore that William Robinson Smith chose in 1759 as the site of the home which was to be known as The Folly. There he built a story and a half house and his grandson, Major William Robinson Custis, made substantial additions in the early 1800's. In 1898 the property

was acquired by L. Floyd Nock and both The Folly and Quarter Kitchen have been soundly and tastefully restored by the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. L. Floyd Nock, Jr.

"Today, as in former years, the land approach to The Folly from the County Road is marked by a tiny gate house whose great chimney dwarfs the house itself. The lane extends through farmlands edged by pine woods, and surrounding The Folly is a grove of old maples and other hard woods. The house is of generous proportions and combines a story and a half section, a two story section, each of frame with gable end of brick, and a colonnade and kitchen.

"One enters the older story and a half portion of the house through a finely detailed entrance porch which leads into a fifteen foot cross hall the far door of which frames a beautiful view of Folly Creek. The interior wood work is splendidly hand carved. In the wainscoted parlor the door and window frames are ornamented with reeding at the sides and fret work across the top. There is a finely carved cornice and the mantel decoration combines several designs of the period, with a center panel embellished by a gouge-work seven-branched candlestick.

"This spacious house provides a perfect setting for furniture of the Queen Anne, Chippendale and later periods which has been collected and used by succeeding generations of an antiques-loving family.

"The old kitchen, reached by a partially enclosed brick passage, is of interest to antiquarians for here are seen many early kitchen utensils. Although the large cooking fireplace no longer serves its original purpose, it is used on frequent occasions to roast oysters that are tonged on Folly shores.

"As an added attraction this year, visitors to The Folly are invited to see the restored and enlarged Quarter Kitchen, now the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Charles D. Pennebaker. This beautifully furnished small house with old beamed ceilings and fine woodwork will charm the visitor with its wide porch, colorful dooryard garden and splendid view of Folly Creek.

"In addition to the Quarter Kitchen, there are other dependencies at The Folly, a dove cote and summer house and a circular ice house sunk deep into the ground. Unhurried visitors may wish to walk down the terraced lawn to the water and enjoy a closer view of the creek from the dock.

"In colonial times Folly Creek Landing was one of two ports of entry for Accomack County. Contemporary records indicate that during the Revolution the Landing was fortified and that the British made unsuccessful attempts to destroy vessels there. There is a tradition of an unsuccessful attempt by the British to set fire to The Folly. In quieter times, however, the old way of life was resumed and General John Cropper noted in his diary that on Monday, 14 of June,

1779, 'Major Custis had a cock fight at Folly Landing.' The history and setting of The Folly will make it easy for the Garden Week visitor to visualize these events, carrying him back many generations into the past as he strolls the spacious grounds."

Prepared by Commander John A. Upshur
Consultant, Colonial Williamsburg
February 1962.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This is a late 18th-century house with unusually fine interior woodwork.

2. Condition of fabric: Very good.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: Main portion is two-and-a-half stories, southwest wall brick, remainder wood frame. One-and-a-half story portion to northeast built earlier with brick ends. One-and-a-half story kitchen to southwest is connected to main portion by colonnade, both of wood construction.

2. Foundations: Brick.

3. Wall construction: Clapboards with several gable ends of brick.

4. Porches: Porches at each end of stairhall of oldest portion of structure and a porch on the northwest side of the taller structure.

5. Openings: Double-hung windows. First floor windows are nine over six light sash. Upper floors have six over six light sash.

6. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: Gable roofs with standing seam tin covering.

b. Cornice: Wood, box cornices.

c. Dormers: Oldest section and kitchen have dormers. Dormer cheek siding runs parallel to roof slope.

7. Chimneys: Brick with corbeled caps.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plan: Oldest section (northeast) has one room and stair hall each floor. Main section has four rooms each floor.
2. Stairways: Stairway is in oldest section.
3. Flooring: Wood, pine floors.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster. First floor room in old section has wood cornice and wood paneled wainscot.
5. Doorways: Door frames of old section, first floor, have jamb casings decorated with reeding and fretwork across the head.
6. Trim: Hand carved, wood cornice, mantel and wainscot cap in oldest part of structure. The carving is intricate and well done; window casings also carved.
7. Hardware: Rim locks.
8. Lighting: Electric.
9. Heating: Central heat.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: House faces Folly Creek to the southeast; has commanding site where Folly Creek forks, with large lawn to creek.
2. Enclosures: Wood paling fence in back of structure.
3. Outbuildings: Restored and rehabilitated quarter kitchen, dovecot and ice house.
4. Landscaping: No formal landscaping but a number of fine trees are scattered over the property.

Prepared by Archie W. Franzen, Architect
National Park Service
March 1960.